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Oleson - Political Evolution of Hawaii





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SOME ELEMENTS
IN THE
POLITICAL EVOLUTION OF HAWAII

BY
WILLIAM B. OLESON

1893

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SOME ELEMENTS IN THE POLITICAL EVOLUTION OF HAWAII.

At a recent meeting of the Congregational Club, in Horticultural Hall, Mr. WILLIAM BREWSTER OLESON read a very interesting paper on "Elements in the Political Evolution of Hawaii," as follows:

I shall confine myself on this occasion to the period of twenty years ago, from January, 1873, to January, 1893. I shall also limit myself to a mere allusion to the more salient events in that brief period of constitutional development.

An important factor in the political evolution of Hawaii was furnished by the career of Kalakaua, the immediate predecessor and brother of Liliuokalani.

In 1873 he advocated his election to the vacant throne by promising to abolish the poll tax, to fill all Government offices with natives, and to remove the prohibition on the sale of liquor to the abo-

rigines. He was unpopular with his own people, and his rival, Lunalilo, was enthusiastically elected King.

Soon after Lunalilo died, and on Feb. 12, 1874, Kalakaua was elected King by the Legislature. It was charged, and generally believed, that he was elected by the use of bribes. It is sufficient here to say that he was protected from a mob of his own people for a period of five days after his election by United States troops.

During his reign he dismissed capable and upright officials, and filled the civil service with political adventurers, who brought scandal to every department of the Government. He caused grog-shops to be licensed in the country districts against the protests of his own people.

He raised the cry, "Hawaii for Hawaiians," hoping thus to curry popularity by exciting race jealousies against foreigners. He sought to create a State church of which he should be the head. His visits to the other islands were utilized for the recrudescence of lascivious orgies of the old heathen religion. He rehabilitated the trade of sorcery, and turned the influence of the Kahunas to his own political advantage.

He stationed soldiers with side-arms in double rows at polling-places, thus intimidating voters and pushing men out of line who were suspected of opposition to his schemes, thus forcibly preventing their voting. He appointed legislators to lucrative

Government positions while they continued to retain seats in the Legislature.

He had the Legislature of 1886 adjourn for three weeks so that members who were tax assessors might go home and perform their duties. These men he employed to carry through the Legislature pernicious and extravagant legislation in opposition to the sentiment of the people. He used the royal franking privilege to pass through the custom-house, free of duty, liquors belonging to certain firms, thus, in one instance, defrauding the Government of revenue to the amount of \$4,749.35.

For this service he received hundreds of cases of cheap gin, which he sent to every voting precinct to secure the election of his candidates to the Legislature. He went personally to one country district, with a company of soldiers, and by their votes defeated Pilipo, the lion of North Kona, Kalakaua's staunchest opponent in the Legislature.

He laid claim to the "primacy of the Pacific," and sent royal commissioners to the New Hebrides and Gilbert Islands and Samoa to prepare for a Hawaiian protectorate over those islands. He warned the great powers of Europe, in a grandiloquent protest, against any further annexation of islands in the Pacific Ocean, claiming for Hawaii exclusive right "to assist those islands in improving their social and political condition."

Finally, he accepted a bribe of \$71,000 from a Chinaman, named Aki, for an opium license which

he had already sold and delivered to another Chinaman who had paid \$80,000 for it.

This career of Kalakaua's had a twofold effect, viz., of arranging in increasing antagonism and bitterness the progressive and retrogressive elements in the population, and of bestowing leadership, on one hand, on the servile partisans of the King, and, on the other, on intelligent Anglo-Saxons, who have, from that time to this, counted as their adherents the more stalwart and independent Hawaiians.

Another element in the political evolution of Hawaii has been the decay of the native race.

The census of 1823 showed the population to be 130,313. According to the census of 1890 the native Hawaiians numbered 34,436, a decrease since 1823 of 95,877. The annual decrease since 1866 has averaged 1,085. Thus, since 1860, when the native Hawaiians numbered 66,984, the decrease has been 50 per cent.

The native Hawaiians now number about one-third of the population. Thus the total population in 1890 was 89,990, of which the Hawaiian numbered 34,436, the Chinese, Japanese, and Polynesians 28,249, and the white foreigners, many of whom were born in the land, 27,305. This decrease of Hawaiians and the corresponding increase of foreigners have depressed the native race, but with an opposite effect on the two radically diverse wings. Thus, on those more susceptible to the corrupting influences of the throne who have fallen into dissipation, and

who are seeking their own personal advancement at the expense of all political morality, this alarming decrease has had the effect of exciting intense race hatred.

On those, however, who are allied to the churches, who have been stalwart in their resistance to Kala-kaua's demoralizing influences, who are to-day the personification of the character and conscience of this remnant of a race, this decrease has had the effect of drawing them into closer and trustful fellowship with the better class of Anglo-Saxons.

Another element in the political evolution of Hawaii has been the growth of the Anglo-Saxon population, which has naturally resulted in the bestowment of political privileges, not otherwise enjoyed even by the Hawaiian people themselves.

This foreign population pays four-fifths of the taxes. It has furnished the capital and skill in the development of every business and industrial enterprise in Hawaii. It is a resident population, with permanent homes and schools and churches and libraries, and social, commercial, and industrial organizations. Under its influence the instruction in all the schools is in the English language. It has its chamber of commerce, its social science association, its historical society, its banks and railroads, and electric lighting, and manual training schools, and benevolent organizations, and eleemosynary institutions. It constitutes the intelligent, progressive, patriotic, governing ability of Hawaii.

Hawaiian churches and schools, and every good work among them, rely on this foreign population for financial assistance.

The best elements among Hawaiians have in the past twenty years uniformly cast in their lot with the white foreigners, and have gratefully accepted their leadership.

This foreign population did not possess suffrage rights until 1887. Under the comparatively wholesome reign of the Kamehameha dynasty, there had arisen no occasion for foreigners to feel the need of suffrage rights to protect their interests.

The career of Kalakaua led to several indignation mass meetings. The first, in August, 1880, protested against the summary dismissal, at 1 o'clock in the morning, of a worthy Cabinet, having a majority of twenty-four in the Legislature. This Cabinet was dismissed at the instance of Claus Spreckels, because it would not permit his acquisition of certain government water privileges in defiance of public interests.

Two days later another mass meeting compelled the dismissal of the infamous Moreno ministry.

On June 30, 1887, the patience of the foreign element having exhausted itself, an enthusiastic mass meeting passed resolutions to the effect "that the administration of the Hawaiian Government has ceased, through corruption and incompetence, to perform the functions and afford the protection to personal and property rights, for which all governments exist," and exacting of the King specific

pledges, within twenty-four hours, of future good conduct on the basis of a new constitution.

The constitution of 1887, subsequently signed by the King, in conformity with the demands of this mass meeting, made "every male resident of Hawaii, American or European descent, after one year's residence, a legal voter." Other privileges were conferred, distinctly enlarging the measure of Hawaiian citizenship, and effectually removing the throne from interference in the Government.

This arrangement deferred to the traditions of the land, retaining the King as a figurehead, while it placed the responsibility for the Government on a Cabinet subject to removal by vote of the Legislature elected by the people.

Emerging thus from an era of bombastic display and political corruption and gross immorality, for six years Hawaii had a wise administration of affairs.

Liliuokalani abhorred the constitution of 1887, and after she came to the throne, at the death of Kalakaua, sought to recover the ancient prerogatives of the throne. January of this year, after being baffled in her attempts for months by the majority in the Legislature, found Liliuokalani ready to resort to drastic measures. She secured enough votes to oust the best Cabinet Hawaii had enjoyed, by agreeing on her part to sign the odious lottery bill. She appointed a ministry in sympathy with her desire for absolute power, prorogued the Legislature, and undertook in the presence of her armed troops to ab-

rogate the constitution of 1887 and to promulgate a new one, making her well-nigh an absolute monarch.

This led to the great mass meeting of Jan. 16, 1893, which took steps to organize a new Government and to seek annexation to the United States.

In all their efforts since 1880 to gain reasonably good government, and, having gained it, to retain it, the foreign population have never had the slightest aid from any foreign Government, either by force of arms or by stroke of diplomacy.

In 1889, when the police and royal troops proved unreliable, and the citizens had to rally and suppress a thoroughly organized rebellion, they learned that the forces of law and order were not to expect, even in such crises, the slightest aid from United States troops, although those troops were ashore and under arms all day in close proximity to the scene of conflict.

If a timid man last January was frightened, and hoped for aid and protection from United States troops, he had nothing to base that hope upon. The aroused citizens were better prepared to cope with the Queen's forces last January than in 1889, when they so successfully quelled the Wilcox insurrection; and, moreover, the Queen and her Cabinet knew it, and discreetly avoided a conflict. Men in the ranks who had the fighting to do knew they must do it themselves. Any other representation is false to facts, which can be amply demonstrated.

Granting that Minister Blount sought an honest

and impartial verdict on the circumstances attending the establishment of the provisional government, the nature of all the evidence submitted is such that another man, equally just and impartial, could have arrived legitimately at a diametrically opposite conclusion, with an abundance of facts to establish it.

This foreign population that has been such a potent factor in the political evolution of Hawaii has never taken united action except in behalf of good government. It has been moderate in its demands, humane in its action, patient with the frailties of an effete monarchy, and uniformly considerate of the political rights of native Hawaiians.

Twenty years of progressive participation in public affairs prepared the foreign population, when the monarchy collapsed, to assume the responsibility for initiating stable and efficient government in the interests of all. This it has courageously undertaken, and with a remarkable measure of success, while awaiting the decision of the United States on the proposal for annexation. It must be borne in mind that the United States was not requested to adjudicate domestic differences in Hawaii, nor was that the ground on which the provisional government was accorded recognition by all the civilized nations. Because of its peculiar relations to Hawaii, covering a period of fifty years, this great country was appealed to to provide a basis for progressive, responsible, republican government.

Such an evolution, as I have briefly outlined, has

crystallized antagonisms and prejudices which it will take years to dissolve, and which would menace and imperil any purely independent national existence. The liability to political unrest, if not actual revolution, would prove as disastrous to Hawaii as in so many instances it has proved to Central American republics.

The situation is so peculiar as to call for the fostering supervision of some strong foreign power under which it would be possible for an efficient and progressive government to grow up, advantageous alike to Hawaii and the commercial and humanitarian interests of that vast ocean.

Such a protective relation the United States has officially declared it will not permit any other nation to assume toward Hawaii. The progress of events demonstrates that, sooner or later, foreign intervention from some quarter is inevitable. If the United States insists that no other nation shall assume the responsibility of guaranteeing in Hawaii the blessings of civilized government, that responsibility the United States is morally bound to accept itself.

BOSTON, Nov. 29, 1893.

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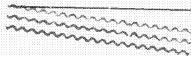
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